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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 000534

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/ PPC (LYNN) AND PM/B (WESTMORELAND)

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [GT](#)

SUBJECT: PROGRESS TOWARD REGIONAL ARMS INVENTORY

Classified By: Robert E. Copley for reason 1.5 (b).

11. (C) Summary: On February 19, Central American Foreign Ministers ratified a model format for providing each other with information about the composition, armaments, material and equipment of their military and police forces. The measure removes another hurdle in establishing a "reasonable balance of power" in the region--a fundamental objective of the 1995 Framework Treaty on Democratic Security in Central America. The measure is also required as a confidence building measure and will serve to shore up the Central American Integration System (SICA), which was created by the Framework Treaty and will oversee implementation of the inventories. Guatemala Foreign Minister Gutierrez said ratification was a tough sell among some of his counterparts. Once implemented, however, Gutierrez believes the measure will strengthen arguments for reducing the size of the Guatemalan military. The Ambassador mentioned the measure during recent consultations with SouthCom Commander General Hill, and suggested that if the inventories appear to be going forward, there could be a substantial USG interest in enlisting an entity, such as the Inter-American Defense Board, to verify them. End Summary.

12. (U) The Foreign Ministers of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, and Nicaragua, as well as the Vice Foreign Minister of Costa Rica and Ambassador Moises Cal of Belize met in Panama City on February 19, inter alia, to ratify the model format for arms inventories. Ratification was the major hurdle in the approval process for the arms inventories begun in August 2001. The model format requires disclosure of information about the composition of naval, land, air and security force units as well as their installations, weapons, material and equipment. The model format provides official definitions for the types of weapons, vehicles, ships and aircraft to be inventoried. In some cases, such as ship-borne radar, the model format requires very specific information. If this initiative goes forward, the resulting disclosures among Central American neighbors could greatly enhance mutual confidence on the isthmus. There are exemptions in the agreement, however, from providing any information that by its nature is reserved in the Constitutions of member states. In the case of Guatemala, Ministers of Defense routinely cite article 30 of the Constitution when refusing to provide a wide array of military information, even to the Guatemalan Congress.

13. (C) Foreign Minister Gutierrez told the Ambassador that ratifying the model format was very difficult and that four of the Ministers in the meeting almost refused to sign. Gutierrez was surprised and pleased with the positive outcome.

14. (C) Comment: This appears to be a step forward in the initiative of Honduran President Maduro as reported by Ambassador Palmer and as discussed December 2002 and February 2003 during the Chiefs of Mission Conferences. Whether or not the Guatemalan military hides behind its Constitution, the value of the inventories as confidence building measures would be greatly enhanced if they could be independently verified. Ambassador Hamilton mentioned the model format in discussions with Combatant Commander Hill of Southern Command February 23, and raised the possibility that the Inter-American Defense Board or a similar entity could verify the inventories.

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